

# 10 Famous 1960s American Gangsters And Mobsters

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During the 1960s, the American criminal underworld was teeming with a cast of notorious characters, including gangsters and mobsters who operated with brazen audacity and cunning. These individuals were known for their illicit activities, which often included organized crime, such as racketeering, extortion, illegal gambling, and drug trafficking.

In this era, these nefarious figures were often associated with prominent crime families, such as the Gambino, Genovese, Lucchese, Bonanno, and Colombo families, which held significant power and influence in various regions across the United States.

These gangsters and mobsters were known for their ruthless tactics and cunning strategies in their pursuit of wealth and power. They often operated with a hierarchical structure, where higher-ranking members, known as bosses or capos, would oversee and direct the criminal activities of their respective families or crews. These crime families were known for their strict code of silence, commonly referred to as omertà, which enforced loyalty and secrecy among their members.

During the 1960s, these gangsters and mobsters were known to have significant influence and control over various industries, including labor unions, construction, trucking, and the entertainment industry. They would often use their power and intimidation to extort businesses and individuals for money, as well as to eliminate rival gangs or individuals who posed a threat to their operations.

However, law enforcement agencies, such as the FBI and local police departments, began to intensify their efforts to combat organized crime during the 1960s. This resulted in high-profile arrests, convictions, and prosecutions of several prominent gangsters and mobsters, leading to the dismantling of some crime families and the imprisonment of key figures.

## 1. Carlo Gambino

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Carlo Gambino, a prominent figure in the Italian-American crime syndicate, held the position of crime boss for the esteemed Gambino crime family. Following the infamous Apalachin Meeting in 1957 and the subsequent incarceration of Vito Genovese in 1959, Gambino ascended to the helm of the Commission, the governing body of the American Mafia, where he wielded considerable influence until his demise due to a heart attack on October 15, 1976. Despite a lengthy tenure spanning over five decades in organized crime, Gambino's time behind bars was relatively limited, serving a mere 22 months for a conviction on tax evasion charges in 1937.

## **2. Paul Castellano**

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Paul Castellano was a prominent Italian-American mobster who served as the boss of the Gambino crime family from 1976 until his untimely assassination in 1985. Known for his astute business acumen and disciplined approach to organized crime, Castellano was often regarded as a calculating and methodical figure within the Mafia.

Castellano was known for his refined and polished demeanor, earning him the nickname "The Howard Hughes of the Mob." He was known to be a shrewd businessman who focused on white-collar crimes, such as extortion and racketeering, and expanded the Gambino crime family's interests into legitimate businesses, including construction, labor unions, and the trucking industry.

Castellano's tenure as the boss was marked by his emphasis on maintaining a low profile. However, Castellano's reign as boss came to a tragic end when he was gunned down in a brazen hit orchestrated by John Gotti, a rival within the Gambino crime family, in 1985. Castellano's death marked a significant shift in the power dynamics of the American Mafia, with Gotti taking over as the new boss of the Gambino crime family.

## **3. Frank Costello**

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Frank Costello was a prominent Italian-American mobster and a leading figure in the American Mafia during the mid-20th century. Known for his cunning and strategic acumen, Costello was considered one of the most influential crime bosses of his time.

Costello was known for his suave and sophisticated demeanor, earning him the moniker “The Prime Minister of the Underworld.” He was known to be a master tactician and skillful negotiator, often resolving conflicts through diplomacy rather than violence. Costello was involved in various criminal activities, including gambling, bootlegging, and labor racketeering, and was considered a pioneer of the national crime syndicate, which sought to establish a centralized network of organized crime across the United States.



Frank Costello jpg. Al Aumuller, World Telegram staff photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Costello’s rise to power was marked by his ability to navigate the complex politics and alliances within the Mafia, often forging alliances and avoiding unnecessary conflicts. He was known for his business acumen and legitimate investments, including owning several nightclubs and casinos, which allowed him to amass considerable wealth and influence.

#### **4. Vito Genovese**

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Vito Genovese, an Italian-born American mobster, emerged as a formidable figure within the American Mafia during the era of Prohibition. He rose to prominence as an enforcer, working alongside his childhood friend and associate, Lucky Luciano. Genovese played a pivotal role in the Castellammarese War, a violent power struggle that shaped the trajectory of organized crime in the United States.

Genovese’s influence extended beyond national borders, as he facilitated the expansion of the heroin trade on an international scale. However, in 1937, he fled to Italy to avoid murder charges and briefly supported Benito Mussolini’s regime during World War II to evade extradition back to the United States. He eventually returned to the U.S. in 1945 and assumed the role of mentor to Vincent “Chin” Gigante, who would later become the boss of the Genovese crime family.

In 1957, Genovese sought to assert his dominance by ordering the murders of Albert Anastasia and a failed attempt on Frank Costello's life, as he vied for the coveted title of the boss of bosses within the Mafia. He called for a summit of Mafia leaders to consolidate his power, but the meeting was thwarted by a police raid. In 1959, Genovese's reign came to an abrupt end as he was convicted on narcotics conspiracy charges and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

While serving time behind bars, Genovese's grip on power weakened as his underling Joe Valachi turned against him, killing an inmate whom he believed was a hitman sent by Genovese. Valachi then became a government witness, further damaging Genovese's criminal empire. Genovese ultimately died in prison on February 14, 1969, marking the end of an era for the notorious mobster.

## **5. Tommy Lucchese**

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Thomas Gaetano Lucchese, also known by the synonyms "Tommy," "Thomas Luckese," "Tommy Brown," or "Tommy Three-Finger Brown," was a prominent Italian-American mobster and a founding member of the Mafia in the United States, which was an offshoot of the Cosa Nostra in Sicily. Lucchese, a key figure in organized crime, held the position of boss of the Lucchese crime family, one of the Five Families that wielded significant influence over criminal activities in New York City, from 1951 to 1967.

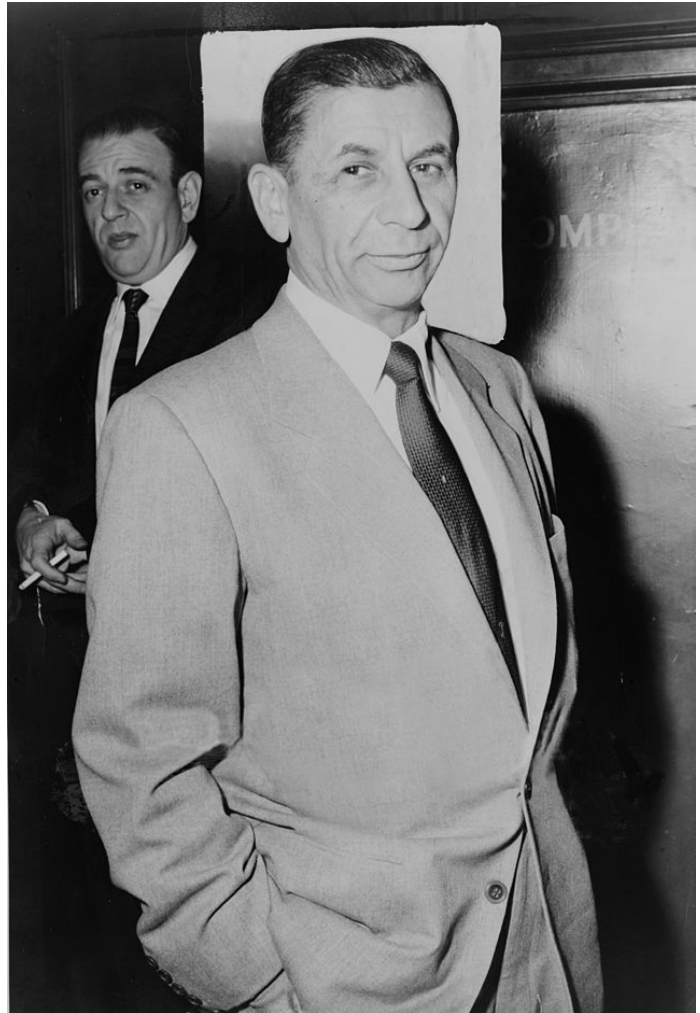
## **6. Meyer Lansky**

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Meyer Lansky, also known as the "Mob's Accountant," was a prominent figure in American organized crime. He played a pivotal role in the development of the National Crime Syndicate in the United States, exhibiting astute financial acumen and strategic acuity. As a member of the Jewish mob, Lansky amassed a vast gambling empire with ownership stakes in casinos worldwide. He held significant sway with the Italian-American Mafia and played a role in

consolidating the criminal underworld, although the true extent of his involvement remains debated.

Despite a lengthy tenure in organized crime, Lansky evaded conviction for anything more serious than illegal gambling. He left behind a legacy as one of the most financially successful gangsters in American history, amassing a fortune of an estimated \$20 million before fleeing Cuba. However, upon his death, his estate was revealed to be valued at a mere \$57,000, underscoring the complexities and mysteries surrounding his wealth and assets.



Meyer Lansky.jpg Al Ravenna, World Telegram staff photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

## 7. Joseph Lanza

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Joseph A. "Socks" Lanza was a notable labor racketeer and a member of the Genovese crime family, renowned for his control over the Fulton Fish Market in Lower Manhattan through the United Seafood Worker's Union Local 359 from 1923 to 1968.

Hailing from Palermo, Sicily, Lanza migrated to the United States and settled in New York, where he worked as a handler in the bustling Fulton Fish Market. He quickly became involved in labor union activities and rose through the ranks to become an organizer for the United

Seafood Workers Union (USW) by 1923. During this time, Lanza also became embroiled in organized crime, ultimately becoming a member of the Luciano and later the Genovese crime family.

As the head of the Local 359 USW, Lanza wielded significant influence by employing strong-arm tactics, such as threatening wholesalers with delays in loading and unloading perishable goods, resulting in immense profits of \$20 million from the Fulton Fish Market alone. Notably, he was the father of Harry Lanza, an associate of the Colombo crime family, who was born on May 4, 1950, and passed away in 2007 in Hyde Park, New York.

Despite being convicted of labor racketeering in 1938, Lanza played a crucial role in safeguarding New York's waterfront during the early 1940s. He provided invaluable assistance to the Office of Naval Intelligence, collaborating with local stevedores and fishermen to track submarines and obtain strategic positions in waterfront installations for conducting counter-espionage activities in the Third Naval District.

However, Lanza's criminal activities caught up with him, and he was convicted of extortion the following year, resulting in a prison sentence of 7½ to 10 years. Upon his release in 1950, Lanza resumed his leadership role in the Fulton Fish Market and, despite a 1957 arrest for a parole violation, he retained control of the area until his death on October 11, 1968.

## **8. Carmine Romano**

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Carmine Romano was a New York mobster and captain in the Genovese Crime Family who held control over the Fulton Fish Market distribution center in Downtown Manhattan. The Fulton Fish Market had a history of mob control, with unloading crews extorting fees and kickbacks from fish companies and engaging in corruption. Romano was removed from the leadership of the seafood union in the late 1970s for extortion, and in 1981 he began shifting control to his younger crew in New Jersey. Romano was convicted of racketeering in 1982 and sentenced to 14 years in prison.

## **9. Joe Adonis**

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Joe Adonis, whose birth name was Giuseppe Antonio Doto, was an Italian-American mobster and a prominent figure in organized crime in the United

States. Adonis was a member of the Luciano crime family (later known as the Genovese crime family) and was involved in various criminal activities, including gambling, bootlegging, and labor racketeering.

Adonis gained notoriety for his involvement in illegal gambling operations, particularly in New York and New Jersey. He was known for his connections with other high-profile mobsters such as Charles “Lucky” Luciano and Albert Anastasia. Adonis also had a reputation for being involved in labor racketeering, using intimidation and violence to control labor unions and extort money from businesses.



Joe Adonis (mugshot) jpg. New York Police Department, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

## 10. Joseph Abate

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Joseph “Joe” Abate was a high-ranking member, or capo, of the New Jersey faction of the Lucchese crime family, a notorious organized crime syndicate. In the 1920s, Abate was known to have served as a formidable enforcer for Al Capone in Chicago, before eventually settling in New Jersey. In June 1976, Abate was present at Anthony Accetturo’s induction ceremony into the Lucchese family, showcasing his influential status within the criminal organization.

By 1979, Abate had entered a period of semi-retirement, with Accetturo assuming his position as boss of the New Jersey faction. Abate relocated to Margate, New Jersey, where he continued to act as a liaison between various mafia families in the state until his retirement from mafia affairs in 1989. Notably, in 1992, Abate’s daughter Catherine Abate was appointed as New York City’s Correction Commissioner, although she was later confronted about her father’s criminal past and denied his involvement in organized crime.